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SUBJECT: CYPRUS: "ARTISTE" PERMIT ABOLISHED, GOC TAKING
OTHER STEPS

REF: SECSTATE 105872

1. (SBU) Summary: In delivering Reftel TIP Tier 2 Watch List Action Plan for Cyprus ("WL Plan"), the Embassy confirmed with high-level GoC contacts that the Ministry of Interior-issued "artiste" work permit -- the favored conduit to traffic women to Cyprus for sexual exploitation in bars and cabarets -- would be effectively abolished on November 1.

Impresarios seeking to bring foreign women to the island to work in these establishments instead will have to solicit permits from the Ministry of Labor, which will apply more stringent oversight to the process; suspect "businessmen" already are noisily protesting the change. Interior Minister Neoklis Sylikiotis has taken to denouncing publicly the "shame" of trafficking, while Justice Minister Kypros Chrysostomides promises additional resources for the police anti-TIP team. Respective sub-units of the RoC's multi-disciplinary anti-trafficking committee will soon launch a public awareness campaign, assess conditions at the government-run victims shelter with an eye toward crafting improved SOPs, and crack down further against human traffickers. End Summary.

Artiste Work Permit Abolished

2. (SBU) Sylikiotis, speaking after a September 12 Ministerial Committee of Employment meeting, announced the effective abolishment of the "artiste" work permit -- a key recommendation in the WL Plan -- effective November 1. Media first trumpeted that the move would end or severely restrict trafficking, only to walk back their claims somewhat after further studying the proposal; still, they spun the change positively. During the October 9 delivery of the WL Plan, Sylikiotis's deputy, Permanent Secretary Lazaros Savvides, confirmed the abolishment and revealed that implementing procedures would go to the Council of Ministers for approval by October 23. Under the proposal, the Ministry of Labor, following practices in other EU member states, would create three types of specialist work permits for "spiritual creators," performers, and supporting staff. There would be objective criteria applied in judging qualifications, Savvides explained, including applicants' international renown and, in the case dance troupes, proof of their prior public performances. (Note: Our NGO contacts were encouraged by the change, reckoning that "artistes" would be allowed to switch employers or even employment sectors after a dispute with their employer, impresarios would have to rewrite their performers' contracts to conform to MOL norms and standards, and the MOL would be able to enforce workplace rules. Contacts could even envision bar/cabaret workers unionizing in the future.)

MOI Reaction to Other Elements of T2WL Action Plan

¶3. (SBU) In reaction to the first recommendation in the WL Plan -- that the GoC demonstrate vigorous law enforcement by upping prosecutions, convictions, and sentencing, Savvides proposed a coordination meeting between the Cypriot police, Attorney General, and MOI personnel to study next steps. Moving to other elements of the Plan, the MOI had completed the design work for the TIP demand reduction campaign -- Recommendation 3 -- and was selecting a vendor to manage its implementation. One of the NGOs serving on the multi-disciplinary committees was already heavily involved in the campaign, Savvides noted. As to Recommendation 4, the committee would soon issue a lengthy report, complete with recommendations for improved SOPs, on the government-run shelter for trafficking victims. Additional resources for the anti-TIP unit, as stipulated in the Plan's fifth recommendation, depended on a more favorable police/Ministry of Justice budget, Savvides explained. He expected, however, a slight increase in his own ministry's budget for anti-trafficking activities. (Note: The Justice Minister informed the Ambassador on October 14 that the police anti-trafficking unit, which was doing "excellent work," would receive increased resources shortly.)

¶4. (U) Minister Sylikiotis on October 13 delivered remarks at an anti-TIP seminar organized by the European Parliament's local office and NGO Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS). Sounding more determined than any high-ranking Cypriot official to date, he pledged to attack

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the TIP problem immediately. Cyprus had to rid itself of this "shame," and required deeds, not words, to do so. It was "unthinkable" that a whole year had passed between enacting the new anti-TIP law and the operation of the multi-disciplinary committee, the Minister continued. Soon, however, the committee would accelerate its work pace and focus on abolishing the "artiste" visa and launching a demand reduction campaign. Sylikiotis acknowledged that changing the work permit regime alone would not eradicate TIP, and called for greater coordination of government and NGO action.

MFA Reaction to T2WL Action Plan

¶5. (SBU) The Embassy presented the WL Plan to the Foreign Ministry on October 10. Acting Political Director George Kasoulides seemed better informed on TIP than in earlier conversations, noting, for example, that Cyprus had not secured a single anti-trafficking conviction under its 2007 anti-trafficking law. Referring to demand reduction, Kasoulides estimated the GOC could double the amount pledged for the campaign by the end of 2008, without explaining, however, from where the money would come. He revealed that the MFA had been pushing within the multi-disciplinary committee to double the number of staff at the shelter, which offered victims 24-hour assistance. Both the MOI and MFA wished to increase the number of police investigators tackling TIP cases, Kasoulides added. In regards to establishing an International Organization for Migration (IOM) office in Cyprus, he pledged that IOM was welcome, and should consult the MFA if it encountered any roadblocks. Kasoulides concluded by claiming he had seen great changes in his colleagues who were tasked to combat TIP, having become less dismissive toward victims' reports of abuse.

The Gall of Them: Impresarios Picket

¶6. (U) Owners and managers of Cyprus's numerous bars and cabarets on October 15 conducted a noisy demonstration outside the Ministry of Interior, protesting the artiste permit's abolishment and arguing that prostitution did not occur in their establishments. The new arrangement under the Labor Ministry would require them to file reams of additional paperwork and increase their employment costs, they continued. Finally, the "businessmen" lamented that no Greek Cypriot woman would dare think to work in a cabaret -- if they could not import labor, how could they survive?

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The Embassy remains hopeful the GOC's louder anti-trafficking rhetoric will convert into additional concrete actions; indications look promising, especially Sylikiotis's vigor in criticizing TIP and the government's heretofore unacceptable performance combating it. Abolishment of the artiste permit was a promising first step, and shortly we should be able to gauge the work of the multi-disciplinary sub-committees tackling other WL Plan recommendations.
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